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Academic Success Beyond Junior College: The Identification and Selection of the Four-Year Student

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I. INTRODUCTION

AN INCREASINGLY important non-terminal function of junior colleges is the identification and selection of students who are able to continue in academic programs of study beyond the 14th year. The status, prestige, and worth of a junior college will often depend to a considerable degree upon the academic success of its transfer students. An increasing number of junior colleges are therefore seeking to develop precise and systematic methods of identifying, evaluating, and selecting potential four-year students. The purpose of this article is to describe the methods that have been developed over a period of several years and used with marked success at Boston University Junior College.

In its junior college, Boston University seeks to provide educational opportunities for the so-called marginal student by means of a two-year college level program specifically designed to meet his needs. Integral to this program is a team system of instruction, a core curriculum, small discussion groups, emphasis on communication skills, and extensive guidance

and counseling services. Students not qualified on the basis of traditional admissions criteria for direct admission into the four-year colleges of the University are here given an opportunity to prove their ability during their two years with the prospect of then being admitted with advanced standing to the program to which they were originally denied admission. Since 1952, over 2,500 students have earned the privilege of a four-year college education through the basic and developmental course of study offered by the Junior College. Today, the major function of this college is to identify and select students who indicate a level of academic readiness which suggests probable success in the four-year program of their choice. To perform its function with maximum effectiveness, the college has devised a unique system consisting of teams of instructors, a council of coordinators representing faculty teams, a review board of experienced academic-administrative personnel who actually make the decisions on student transfers, and an appeal board to which students denied transfers may be referred.

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II. THE TEAM AND COUNCIL OF TEAM COORDINATORS

The faculty team, already described in two previous issues of the *Junior College*

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Journal,¹ plays a fundamental role in the process of identification of transfer students. Five faculty members representing all areas of the core curriculum work as a team throughout the academic year, teaching the same sections of students, meeting weekly for team meetings, and, at the end of the year, evaluating each student's academic potential and transfer prospects. Last year eight faculty teams worked with 32 sections of approximately 25 students each. The team system has proven to be a valuable asset to the total college program: It permits coordination of faculty effort in curriculum planning; it utilizes informal means to create learning experiences for students outside the classroom; it eliminates waste in the learning situation through integrative instructional effort; it inculcates the democratic ideal of "learning-through-cooperating"; and, especially important in this context, it permits coordinated faculty evaluation of the student body. In short, it provides a personalized individual approach to learning that has been instrumental in assisting the student to make full use of his academic potential.

As a part of its periodic evaluation of the student body, the team seeks to identify those students who should be considered for transfer with Boston University. Each team, directed by a team coordinator, makes a careful study of the academic potential, academic achievement, and over-all growth of its students, submitting to the Review Board a list of students meriting consideration for transfer. In making this prognosis and recom-

mendation, the team examines all evidence concerning the student, including his grades, test data, and comments made by each instructor on his attitudes, personality traits, interests, efforts, assets, and liabilities. In its recommendations, the team is concerned primarily with the educational progress and growth of each student and with his potential for success in the four-year program of his choice.

To achieve uniformity of action in such matters as transfer recommendations and to insure the effective functioning of the team system of the college, a Council of Team Coordinators was formed three years ago. This council provides a means of bridging the gap between the teams and the administrative units of the college. Through it, coordinators representing all teams can share pertinent information about transfer procedures and can carry back to their teams suggestions for improving individual team efficiency. While the council is not an administrative unit, it can make such decisions on procedure as will implement existing policy, present recommendations to the Faculty Assembly with respect to new policy on team affairs considered academic in nature, and give recommendations to the dean of the college with respect to new policy on team affairs that is considered administrative in nature.

The role of the team in identifying and selecting the four-year student is continually being refined and redefined by the Council of Coordinators. This encourages improvement in team functioning and makes it possible for teams to adjust their transfer recommendation criteria to changing circumstances and new factors operating in the larger university structure.

¹ Vernon A. Anthony et al., "The Team Approach to General Education," *Junior College Journal*, XXVII, 319-327, 405-410.

III. THE REVIEW BOARD AND THE APPEAL BOARD

At the end of the academic year, teams pass on their recommendations regarding transfer to the Review Board, which is composed of five divisional chairmen, the dean, the assistant dean, and the registrar of the college. This board, a cross-section of academic-administrative personnel, can examine both the academic and administrative aspects of its action in considering students recommended for transfer. It must be concerned with the total as well as the individual effects of decisions, for the future of the college and the transfer privileges of future students will depend upon the validity of these decisions.

In re-examining team recommendations, the Review Board must first attain a consistency of action which will insure fair and impartial consideration for each potential transfer student. Even though some uniformity has already been achieved within divisions in the distribution of grades by means of suggested grading curves, a significant portion of each student's final grade is influenced by subjective measures used by individual instructors. Thus, the Review Board must examine independently both the divisional grading curves and the grades of individual instructors and make every effort to interpret each grade in terms of an over-all pattern developed from a study of each instructor's grades and their meaning and relationship to other grades. Further, the board attempts to evaluate all grades, comments, and recommendations with reference to a "successful transfer pattern," a conceptual design developed out of previous experiences of the board and based upon the combination of abil-

ities, aptitudes, and achievements which has been found to be essential to further academic success when students leave the college.

Second, the Review Board must set up a carefully-planned system of checks and balances to protect against an unjust decision and to prevent any potential transferee from being ignored. By referring to student test scores on examinations administered upon admission (*e.g.*, the Ohio State University Psychological Examination and the Cooperative Reading Test) and re-administered at the end of one year of study, the board gets a clearer conception of each student's progress. For example, a student who scores prior to admission at the 40th percentile on the OSU and at the 30th percentile on the C₂T and who after one year of study scores at the 60th percentile and the 45th percentile on the same respective measures is considered a better transfer candidate than a student who had the same scores upon admission but showed little or no growth on post-testing a year later. Examining post-test scores of individual students, the Review Board compares the scores of the student with the median, first, second, third, and fourth quartile scores of those students who originally were accepted into the college to which the student now seeks transfer. The student already enrolled in the four-year college is of course considered a better transfer candidate than the student who still tests below the minimum levels set for admission.

Third, the Review Board must evaluate its present decisions in terms of prior decisions and their effects in order to improve the record of success of the transfer group. While the board's recommendations are technically subject to review by

the college to which the student seeks transfer, its recommendations are tantamount to transfer since the four-year colleges of Boston University have agreed to take students from the Junior College upon recommendation of the college's faculty and administration. The Review Board must therefore continually examine the records of students who have transferred to these colleges in the past. Their success or failure establishes patterns that are the bases for Review Board action. Potential transfer students must fall into the pattern of success as the Review Board conceives it. Also, the board must constantly watch for changes in the academic requirements, standards, and programs of the colleges to which they recommend students and modify its own patterns to fit changing conditions outside the junior college.

Finally, through its decisions the Review Board must maintain a high level of public relations with the colleges accepting junior college students if transfer privileges with these colleges are to be continued. Within Boston University there is total agreement that no student can transfer from the Junior College to one of the four-year colleges of the University without recommendation of the faculty of the Junior College. At present, the Junior College students' records of success approximate and, in many instances, improve upon, the records established by students admitted directly into the University's four-year colleges. Unfortunately, it is not possible to request colleges outside the University to accept only those students from the Junior College who are considered good transfer candidates by this college. However, each transcript of a Junior College student's record sent to

other colleges and universities is accompanied by an information sheet containing the following statement: "Boston University Junior College students are recommended by the Junior College for transfer to other collegiate institutions only when a letter from our Division of Psychology and Guidance so states." Such a letter, giving detailed personal data, if not attached, is forwarded by the Division of Psychology and Guidance upon request. From reading a letter written by the student's counselor, inquiring institutions can get a full report of the student's academic progress to date and his academic potential for the future. Included in the letter is the counselor's interpretation of the team's evaluation of the student and a statement of whether or not the student has been recommended for transfer by the Junior College faculty and administration.

When the Review Board has reached its decisions and students have been notified of them, there is one last way of reducing the percentage of error in decisions which might result in by-passing a student qualified for transfer. This is through an Appeal Board consisting of three members, the dean, the assistant dean, and a third faculty representative. This board hears all petitions of students who ask for a reconsideration of Review Board decisions. It weighs all available evidence and can take into account any new evidence that may not have been available at the time of the Review Board meetings. For example, financial difficulties, family or health problems may have prevented a student from operating with maximum efficiency in his studies. Although the Appeal Board makes a few reversals of Review Board decisions, it provides a

way of checking for any inconsistencies in decisions and permits consideration of unusual cases.

IV. CONCLUSION

Boston University Junior College has attempted to solve its problem of the identification and selection of four-year students by using a team and review board system of recommendation. Vital to the success of this system and of the Junior College has been the development of a "recommend-accept" relationship between the two-year and four-year colleges of that University. To win the respect of the four-year colleges and subsequently the privilege of transferring its students into four-year programs, the two-year college has had to assure a record of successful transfer.

The authors do not suggest that it is the primary task of junior colleges to be concerned with marginal students. Still, varying maturation patterns, inadequate

preparation, lack of high school guidance, limited reading and study skills, and personal and family problems often make it virtually impossible to distinguish accurately the two-year student from the four-year student upon completion of a high school program. This is why junior college education can be so important to students who do not know how far their abilities will carry them, who seek guidance as to their future course, and who may originally seek only two years of college education but are inspired by their growth to change their educational goals. Sound transfer procedures in a two-year college program, carefully developed and systematized and applied by the people who have been intimately concerned with the education of the students involved, should be far more significant and instrumental in effecting the transfer of students into a four-year program than the admissions criteria on which so many four-year colleges now depend.